UNITED
NATIONS

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

The Government's commitment was also reflected in the secured funding within the national budget for the purpose of improving women's lives. The Committee was further informed that considerable improvements have been made in the fields of women's health and education.

3. At the same time, the representative of the Philippines acknowledged that, although much progress had been achieved since the consideration of the State party's second report, there was still more to be done before the Convention was fully implemented in the country. She also noted the lack of an effective mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Convention. She described the major challenge posed by the Government's decentralization policy to the achievement of the effective implementation of the Convention.

4. The representative noted that, in spite of the rapid economic recovery, women in the Philippines had suffered disproportionately from poverty, thus contributing to the continued feminization of overseas employment. Rural women have been particularly affected, and this has led to the migration of a large number of rural women to urban areas as well as overseas. She reported that this has been a major concern of the Government of the Philippines and it had set up, inter alia, monitoring centres, counselling services, specific support programmes, as well as providing welfare assistance. The Committee was informed that most women migrant workers were employed as entertainers and domestic helpers. These jobs often put them in a very vulnerable position and exposed them to risks of violent abuse. In this respect, the representative recognized that further efforts were required to establish more effective systems to allow the particular needs and problems of women migrant workers to be addressed.

5. The representative alerted the Committee to the increasing incidence of crimes of violence against women. Various measures had been taken by the Government to combat this, reflecting the Committee's General Recommendation No. 19. The Committee was informed that various support systems had been set up, including women's shelter homes and a 24-hour helpline. Several bills had also been tabled, for example on rape and domestic violence, as a result of the lobbying of NGOs. However, it remained to be seen whether they could be effectively implemented. The Government was aware that the prevailing gender-stereotyped images had to be eliminated and that a public awareness-raising campaign needed to be organized in this regard.

6. The Committee was further informed that prostitution was illegal in the Philippines. However, the representative noted that there had been changes in public opinion on this subject, and much debate had been taking place in the country in relation to the issue.

7. The representative of the Philippines concluded her presentation by assuring the Committee of her Government's commitment to advancing the status of women.

Concluding comments

Introduction

8. The Committee welcomed the good presentation by the Government of the Philippines, and commended it in particular on the high quality of its fourth periodic report, which contained detailed information on the implementation of the Convention in accordance with the committee's guidelines. The report gave a comprehensive overview of legal and administrative measures taken by the Philippines Government, and the analysis indicated a good understanding of the obstacles to the advancement of women. At the same time, it lacked factual information, including statistics, on the actual effect of government programmes and policies. The Committee applauded the initiative of the Government to collaborate with NGOs in preparing the report. The Committee was particularly pleased with the frank and sincere approach of the national machinery in identifying the major obstacles to the elimination of discrimination against women.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

9. The Committee noted with concern the absence of monitoring mechanisms and indicators to measure the effect of government policies and programmes, and the impact of laws and administrative directives and regulations.

10. The Committee noted the apparent gap between such an awareness and the effects of certain government policies, in particular in the economic field with respect to privatization, free trade zones, rural development and the export of labour, which have a disproportionate impact on women.

11. The Committee expressed its concern with respect to the trend towards decentralization of government and the transfer of powers to local decision-makers who are often not gender-sensitized, and emphasized the need for capacity-building and awareness-raising of those responsible for implementing policies.

Positive aspects

12. The Committee welcomed the adoption by the Government of the Philippine Plan for Gender-responsive Development, 1995-2025, and also the priority policy imperatives set by the national machinery for women to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and to mainstream gender and development throughout government.

13. The Committee commended the decision to allocate a given percentage of all governmental budgets to women-specific programmes and projects, and encouraged an increase in the apportioned percentage.

14. The Committee noted with satisfaction several measures taken between the third and fourth periodic reports, such as credit assistance to women, legislation prohibiting sexual harassment, raising the minimum wage for domestic workers and increasing maternity and paternity benefits for employed persons.

15. The Committee applauded the report on an initial consultation to measure women's unremunerated work within a satellite account to the national economic system.

16. The Committee also highly commended the increase in the number of women's NGOs working at the grass-roots level and their significant contribution to the advancement of women, which was reflected in the reports of the State party.

17. The Committee expressed its deep admiration for the exceptionally high level of literacy (93 per cent) among Filipino women.

Principal subjects of concern

18. The Committee expressed its grave concern about the economic reforms which had resulted in a positive growth in the gross national product (GNP), on the one hand but in an increasing gap in the rates of employment of women and men and the economic marginalization of women on the other. Such damage, even if short-term, will be increasingly hard to rectify. It appears that, for lack of economic livelihood, rural women migrate to urban areas where unemployment is higher than ever, and this might account for the large number of sex workers in illegal prostitution and for the high proportion of women migrating as overseas contract workers.

19. The Committee commented on the discriminatory application of the laws against prostitution which are enforced against sex workers and not the men involved as traffickers, pimps and clients, and noted further that forced medical examinations of the women without similar attention to the male clients is not effective as a public health measure.

20. The Committee expressed its deep concern about deficiencies in the legal system with regard to violence against women, in view of the fact that incest and domestic violence are not specifically penalized by law and are surrounded by silence.

21. The Committee regretted the decentralization of population and development services from the national to the local government units, which had apparently resulted in the prohibition of contraceptives in one of the provinces, in contravention of the Convention (articles 12 and 16 (e)).

22. The Committee noted further with concern that despite the increased participation of women in decision-making in the public sphere especially in NGOs, there was still a very low representation of women in politics, top levels of government, and the judiciary.

Suggestions and recommendations

23. The Committee urged the Government of the Philippines to adopt a top-priority policy of creating safe and protected jobs for women as a viable economic alternative to the current unemployment of women and their participation as subcontractors and in the informal sector, as workers in free trade zones or as in commercial sex, or as migrant overseas contract workers.

24. The Committee suggested that the Government re-examine its economic policy in the light of the alarming indicators that economic growth was occurring while women were being widely marginalized and exploited, on the one hand, and encouraged to leave their homes and families for overseas employment, on the other.

25. The Committee strongly recommended that the Government establish a special national focal point to provide information and support services to women before departure for overseas work, as well as in the receiving countries in cases of need.

26. The Committee suggested that appropriate measures for dealing with prostitution should focus on penalizing traffickers and creating alternative job opportunities for the women.

27. The Committee strongly urged the Government to enact appropriate legislation to combat violence against women and to compile the relevant data.

28. The Committee recommended that reproductive and sexual health services, including family planning and contraception, be made available and accessible to all women in all regions.

29. The Committee recommended that temporary special measures should be adopted to increase the participation of women in top-level decision-making positions in the public sector.

30. The Committee suggested a strong need for developing gender-disaggregated data in all areas.

31. In order to facilitate the implementation of the Convention, the Committee recommended that monitoring mechanisms and indicators be developed to measure the effect of government policies and programmes.